TENTERFIELD SHIRE COUNCIL
COMMUNICATION PLAN

1. The Benefits of Communication

Effective communication provides a strong foundation upon which Councils can more effectively develop and maintain the community's assets.

If aligned with Council's operating goals and plans, effective communication can increase the speed at which we achieve these goals.

Effective communication with the community can provide the following benefits –

- Assists in building a positive reputation;
- Strengthens and bonds relationships with stakeholders;
- Generates community support and involvement;
- Improves customer satisfaction levels;
- Provides a platform of strength from which to manage any crisis;
- Attracts business and residents to the area;
- Improves staff morale and job satisfaction.

Easy to understand, good communication practice can reduce costs and increase community support. All of which make the day-to-day activities and long term goals and aims easier to achieve.

2. Principles of Good Communication

2.1 Visibility

To commence or maintain a strong two-way communication relationship with the community it is important that Council activities are visible as much as possible. Visibility leads to recognition and acceptance plus it allows the community to see the breadth and value of Council's activities.

2.2 Simplicity

The community is busy with many aspects of their lives whether at work or home. Communication must be simple and straight forward.

2.3 Repetition

Wherever possible a repetitive schedule should be devised for message placement to ensure it receives community consideration. The more a message is repeated the wider the audience will become.

2.4 Value

Ensuring a message has a reasonable level of value for the recipient is paramount to gain their attention and interest. The rule of thumb here is that Council operating in a bureaucracy hold little value to the community but how the bureaucracy affects the community hold a high level of value. Therefore, messages should be structured with the community effect as their foundation.

2.5 Listening

Good (and effective) communication requires two parties - the giver and the receiver. If you send a message you must also expect to receive some form of response at times. It is important that feedback on all issues is encouraged and processed. Nothing will dampen the community's enthusiasm quicker than the belief that they are not being listened to.

2.6 Consistency

To build credibility and a positive reputation messages need to be consistent. If your messages are ALWAYS simple, hold a value for the recipient, encourage feedback and are placed in a variety of different places they will generate interest and earn respect at an increasing level each time they are placed.

2.7 Evaluation

The only accurate way of knowing if your communication is good or not is to evaluate its effectiveness (and the best way to do that is to set a goal for each one and then evaluate if it has been achieved).

3. Stakeholders

All Community Members inclusively are considered stakeholders of Council.

4. Council's Branding

It is important to ensure that the community is informed about Council and its activities so it is in all our interests to:

- Generate greater understanding of and support for Council activities;
- Increase community awareness of Council responsibilities;
- Increase community interest in Council activities;
- Improve community understanding of Local Government Governance and staff professionalism.

5. Communication Mediums

What you say, how you say it and what communication medium you say it with all require equal consideration when trying to find the right balance between cost and effectiveness, consistency and repetition.

A further consideration is the impact communication can have and the fundamental requirement to ensure that you 'walk the talk'.

Another support consideration is 'visibility'. As a foundation it is good practice to ensure, where appropriate, that Council's activities are highly visible - telling your community about the good work Council is doing on their behalf is a positive initiative but showing them your work in action is ultimately more powerful.

Evaluating the impact of the communications mediums used will provide the most accurate view of what return upon investment can be achieved by different methods.

As a result of the Customer Satisfaction Survey conducted in March 2015, and following the Councillor Workshop in July 2015 (in accordance with the Operational Plan 2015/16) It was highlighted that Council need to stream line its communication, widen the distribution and make it simpler (not so many mediums and different timeframes etc).

5.1 Newsletter

In response Council will focus on publishing a Newsletter each fortnight with the relevant information covering public notices and illustrating achievements and promoting events.

This Newsletter will also be available on Council's web-site, on subscription, forwarded to the local radio station and placed on notice boards.

5.2 Media Releases

Council will continue to prepare media releases as relevant and in line with Council's Media Policy.

5.3 Public Meetings

Community Engagement Meetings will be held once a year in May/June to inform the community of the Operational Plan, key projects, rates, fees and charges and budgets.

Public meetings will also be held on current issues and as the need arise.

5.4 Customer Service

Council has a customer service team that provide information to the community over the phone. Refer to the Citizen Customer Services Charter.

5.5 Correspondence

All Correspondence will be attended to according to the standards.

5.6 Community Engagement

A separate Community Engagement Strategy is developed for the Community Strategic Plan (Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework).

6. Communication and Planning

A good simple Communication Plan can play a significant role in the success of any program, project or initiative of your Council.